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OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES: A NATIONWIDE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor recreation expenditures are increasing rapidly. Results suggest that growth will continue. The implications for demand and its impact upon resources and management must be addressed. The role of the private sector will have to be increased significantly.

OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES: A NATIONWIDE STUDY

Outdoor recreation has become a major facet of leisure behavior. Greater than 75% of the American public participates in outdoor recreation on a regular basis. From 1976 to 1981, spending in leisure activities increased by 47% (accounting for inflation) to \$250 billion, with indications that spending would be over \$400 billion in 1984. U.S. Department of Commerce reports on personal expenditures for recreational goods and services as a portion of total consumer spending showed an increase in 1983. Today one out of every eight dollars is spent on some form of leisure. Crowded campgrounds, waiting lines at boat launch ramps, and the ubiquitous outdoor clothing catalog further attests to the popularity of outdoor pursuits. An important aspect of this leisure boom

is the amount and type of expenditures associated with it. Although a large body of research on participation patterns exists, little systematic effort has been directed toward evaluating expenditures associated with this involvement on a nationwide basis.

The purpose of this study was to use data from a nationally representative sample to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of current outdoor recreation related expenditures.
2. Has there been an increase or decrease in outdoor recreation expenditures?
3. Do individuals anticipate increasing or decreasing outdoor recreation related expenditures in the future?

A paper that appeared in the Spring, 1984, issue of Visions was a look at the first wave of responses from recent national outdoor recreation survey. This paper will report on the final results from all of the survey participants.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey data used was gathered as part of the 1983 Nationwide Recreation Survey (NRS). The NRS was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Administration on Aging, and Bureau of Land Management. The National Park Service coordinated the NRS. Data were collected as a supplement to the National Crime Survey (NCS), an on-going survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. The NCS was a three year panel survey in which data were collected every six months from each panel member. The exit rotation of panel members was used to collect the NRS data. The NRS was collected on a sample of individuals (n = 6720) 12 years of age or older in the non-institutionalized United States population. Personal interviews were conducted by trained interviewers working for the United States Bureau of the Census.

## RESULTS

### Current Expenditures

Respondents were asked whether they had spent money on outdoor recreation in the 12-month period preceeding the study. Approximately half of the respondents (59.2%) had. Over 70% of these individuals incurred travel costs for outdoor recreation, including food and lodging. The second most common expense was for fees to enter and use recreation facilities (62.4%). Other expenses included sporting goods, such as balls, golf clubs, and fishing tackle (49.3%), clothing (41.2%), other equipment and supplies (34.2%), vehicles, including boats, snowmobiles

and recreation vehicles (26.2%), maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment (22.3%), and camping equipment.(17.8%)

Table 1 lists all expenditures included in the study as well as the number and percentage of respondents identifying each.

Study participants were also asked to identify their most costly outdoor recreation expenditure. Travel costs were named most costly by 44.9% of the respondents. It was followed by sporting goods (12.9%), entry and user fees (12.4%), and outdoor recreation related vehicles (9.2%).(see Table 2)

A final question concerning current expenditures related to the amount of money spent in the previous year. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a wide diversity in money spent. The most typical response was \$100-249, followed by under \$50 and \$250-499.

#### Past Expenditures

Approximately 40% of the respondents answering the question relating to changes in outdoor recreation expenditures over the two years preceeding the study had increased the percentage of money spent. Forty percent were spending the same percentage, and 19.5% were spending a smaller percentage.

#### Future Expenditures

Few respondents (9.1%) anticipated spending less on outdoor recreation two years from the time of the study. Over 43% of the respondents anticipated increasing the percentage of their money spent for outdoor recreation.

#### DISCUSSION

The data from the study point toward the pervasiveness of outdoor recreation in this country. Almost 60% of the American public spent money for outdoor recreation. This supports the notion that outdoor recreation constitutes a substantial portion of the leisure industry in general. Items such as travel, clothing, sporting goods and entry fees appear to be included in the budget in a large number of households. Over 25% of the individuals who spent money on outdoor recreation claimed to have spent \$500 or more. Obviously, outdoor recreation is big business. The future of the outdoor recreation enterprise looks even brighter. Eighty-six percent of the respondents planned to spend almost the same percentage or a higher percentage of their money on outdoor recreation in the next two years.

## Implications

Given the already high levels of expenditures, the implication is that outdoor recreation is going to continue to be a major part of the leisure industry. Therefore, companies producing equipment for outdoor recreation activities will continue to grow and both revenues and product lines will expand.

Increased expenditures for outdoor recreation equipment will be accompanied by increased use of areas and facilities where such equipment will be used. The demands on public parks will continue to increase. As a result, management approaches will need to be developed to relieve the pressures of high demand for a limited resource.

The constriction of the federal role in the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services will continue in spite of the projected increase in demand for them. The void created by the withdrawal of the federal government will provide an incentive for the private sector to increase its role in meeting the demand. For instance, a recent trend toward the operation of campgrounds by the private sector within national parks and forests can be expected to continue and become more common.

The user of outdoor facilities can expect increases in fees and charges as tax support for outdoor recreation is withdrawn and private entrepreneurship increases. Users will be asked to pay for their own recreation as the public no longer will be subsidizing it.

Finally, these trends suggest the need for park and recreation professionals to emphasize the skills needed to contend with the business of outdoor recreation. The education of leisure service providers will need to include training in business administration, marketing, public relations and financing.

## CONCLUSION

Projections suggest the demand for outdoor recreation will continue to increase for at least the next twenty years. In fact, the leisure industry is expected to be larger than any other business by 1990. While the recreational preferences of users may change, these data support the idea that demand and expenditures for outdoor recreation will continue unabated for the near future.

TABLE 1

Expenditures for Outdoor Recreation  
 (Base: Those respondents who spent money in the past 12 months on  
 outdoor recreation)

Expenditure	%
Fees for entering and using outdoor recreation areas and facilities	62.4
Boats, snowmobiles, aircraft, bicycles, and recreation vehis,luding campers, etc.	26.2
Sporting goods, including balls, golf clubs, fishing tackle, etc.	49.3
Camping equipment	17.8
Clothing for outdoor recreation	41.2
Other equipment and supplies	34.2
Maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment	22.3
Travel costs for outdoor recreation including food and lodging	71.1

TABLE 2

Type of Expenditure Costing the Most Money  
(Base: Respondents identifying most costly expenditure)

*Expenditure	%
Fees for entering and using outdoor recreation areas and facilities, including membership fees	12.4
Boats, snowmobiles, aircraft, bicycles, and recreation vehicles, including campers, etc.	9.2
Sporting goods, including balls, golf clubs, fishing tackle, etc.	12.9
Camping equipment	3.1
Clothing for outdoor recreation	5.1
Other equipment and supplies	5.5
Maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment	3.8
Travel costs for outdoor recreation including food and lodging	44.9
Other	1.7
No one item was most expensive	1.5

\*Adjusted frequency used

TABLE 3

Dollars Spent on Outdoor Recreation  
Over a 12 Month Period

Amount	%
None	0.2
Under \$50	10.6
\$50 - \$99	8.6
\$100 - \$249	13.6
\$250 - \$499	9.9
\$500 - \$999	7.6
\$1,000 and over	8.1
N.A.	41.4